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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet, targeted to boys, discusses issues surrounding puberty. The introduction describes the reaction of parents' to their children's process of growing up, as well as the reaction of other boys and girls to the physical changes of puberty. Physical changes that happen during puberty for girls and boys are listed. Books for boys on puberty are listed. Methods of obtaining these books are described, including purchasing them from a bookstore, taking them out of a library, and ordering them from a publisher. Suggestions are provided for how boys can talk to their parents about puberty. Suggestions range from thinking about picking a good time and place to talk to writing as an alternative to talking to parents. Specific information about menstruation is provided. Topics covered include timing and duration of menstruation and girls' and boys' reactions to menstruation. (ABL)

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BOY

TALK
FOR BOYS GROWING UP.

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BY MARGARET L. STUBBS with illustrations by Jennifer E. Putnam.

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BODY TALK FOR BOYS GROWING UP

By Margaret L. Stubbs

Illustrations by Jennifer E. Putnam

Design and Production by Jan Putnam

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WHY THIS PAMPHLET?

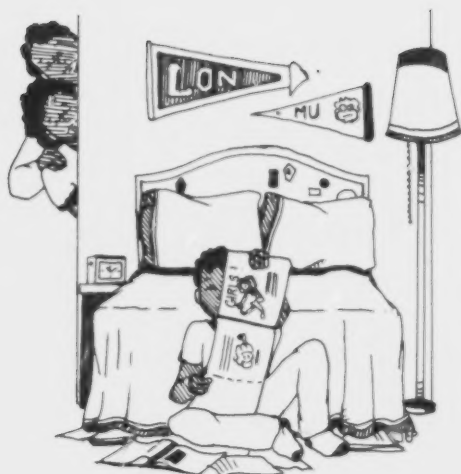
Some periods of growth are more dramatic than others.



During the first few years of your life, every accomplishment—your first smile, being able to roll over, sit up, crawl, take your first step, say your first word—was a celebrated sign of your growing independence as a person.

Puberty, which occurs roughly between the ages of 10 and 14, is another period of dramatic change. During this time, your body matures physically. You begin to look less like a child and more like an adult.

Adults are not always comfortable relating to or helping people your age who are becoming physically more mature. In fact, many adults find it harder to help their children during puberty than when they were much younger.

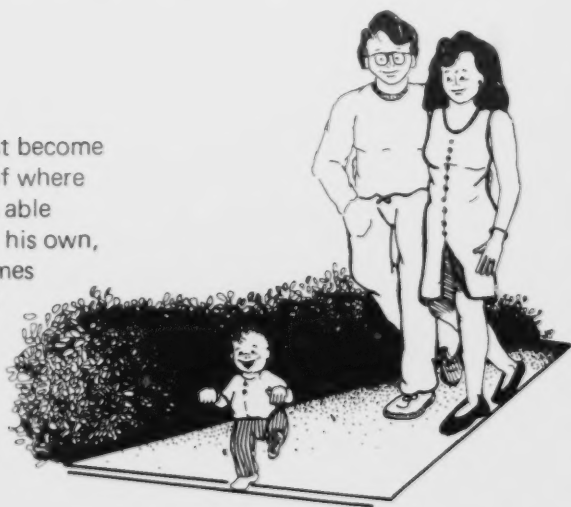


For some reason, when kids start to look like adults, and begin to act more grown up, some people get a little nervous.

Maybe it's because the balance of everything has to change.

It's a little like what happened with some of the earlier changes. When a toddler learns to walk, parents no longer have to carry the child or take along a stroller.

But they must become more aware of where the toddler is able to wander on his own, —and sometimes very quickly!



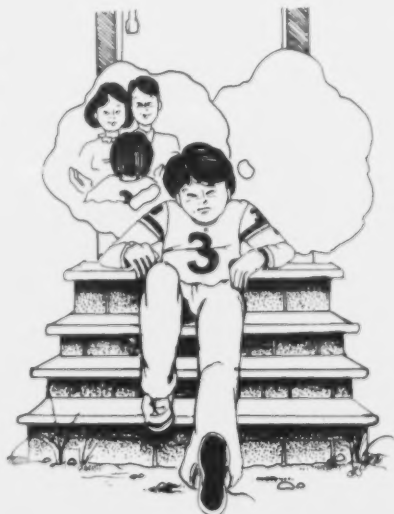
Each new change or accomplishment calls for a slightly different arrangement. And it takes time for everyone to adjust.

Some kids your age are very concerned about what's going to happen to them when their bodies start to change. And **lots** of kids who have noticed their bodies changing have questions about what is happening to them.

Some kids feel very comfortable talking to their parents about their concerns. And some—but not all—parents are very comfortable talking with their kids about almost anything.

Other kids can't imagine such a conversation with their parents—or anyone, even their friends.

Everyone grows at different rates, and friends may feel out of touch with each other if they are not experiencing the same kinds of changes at the same time.



Getting along with girls your own age can be complicated during puberty, too. Kids your age know that some of the physical changes during puberty happen only to boys, while others happen only to girls. But, in general, boys don't know much about what happens to girls, and girls don't know much about what happens to boys either!



What can happen as a result is that boys feel uncomfortable around girls and girls feel uncomfortable around boys. There can be a lot of teasing back and forth, and a lot of embarrassment on both sides.

You may not be experiencing any pubertal changes right now. You may be wondering when it's all going to start for you. Or you may be noticing changes in some of your friends. Or perhaps you have started to change a bit yourself, and have questions about, or reactions to, those changes.

This booklet is intended to be helpful to you—whether or not you've begun to change.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING PUBERTY?

A number of physical changes occur during puberty. Here's a list of some of them, in the order in which they often—*but not always*—occur:

For Boys

Testes and penis begin to grow
 Straight pubic hair begins to appear
 Voice Changes begin
 Ejaculation becomes possible
 Pubic hair becomes kinky
 A growth spurt occurs
 Underarm hair appears
 More noticeable voice changes occur

For Girls

Breasts start to enlarge
 Straight pubic hair begins to appear
 A growth spurt occurs
 Pubic hair becomes kinky
 Menstruation begins
 Underarm hair appears

You may not know all of the terms mentioned in this list. Or you might want more information about any one of the changes listed.

The big question is — **how can you get the information to answer your questions?**

HOW TO GET INFORMATION

Of course, one way to get information is by reading. The following books are easy to read and have lots of information in them about all of these and other topics.

Ruth Bell, **Changing Bodies, Changing Lives**, Random House, New York, \$9.95.

JoAnn Gardner-Loulan, Bonnie Lopez, and Marcia Quackenbush, **Period**, Volcano Press, P.O. Box 270, Volcano, CA 95689, \$6.95. (This book is also written in Spanish.)

Lynda Madaras's **Growing Up Guide for Girls**, Newmarket Press, New York, \$9.95.

Lynda Madaras, **What's Happening to My Body? A Guide for Mothers and Daughters**, Newmarket Press, New York, \$9.95.

Lynda Madaras, **The What's Happening to My Body Book for Boys: For Parents and Sons**, Newmarket Press, New York, \$9.95.

Peter Mayle, **What's Happening to Me?**, Lyle Stuart, Inc., 120 Enterprise Avenue, Secaucus, NJ 07094, \$6.95.

Peter Mayle, **Where Did I Come From?**, Lyle Stuart, Inc., 120 Enterprise Avenue, Secaucus, NJ 07094, \$6.95.

Kathy McCoy, **The Teenage Survival Book**, Wallaby Books, Simon & Schuster, New York, \$9.95.

Note: Some of the prices listed may have changed.

To get these books, you could:

- Check them out of the library.
- Buy them yourself at a bookstore.
- Order them directly by writing to the publisher.
- Ask your parents to get them for you.

If you're like a lot of kids, you might be thinking . . .

I could never ask my parents to buy these books; they don't even know I'm thinking about this stuff.

I wouldn't be able to find them in the library, and I'd be too embarrassed to ask for help.

I don't have enough money to buy them. How do you order a book from a publisher anyway?

What would I do with them after I got them? Where could I keep them? I wouldn't be able to read them because I wouldn't want anyone to know I had them—especially my (mother/father/sister/brother).

TIPS FOR THE TONGUE-TIED

Let's start with the easy ones first. Remember that shopkeepers and librarians are **supposed** to be helpful to people who need their assistance. Being helpful is a part of their job. These people have had experience helping people of all ages find information about all kinds of embarrassing issues, and generally do not pry, and are very matter-of-fact in doing their work. Keep in mind that shopkeepers in particular are motivated to please their customers in return for their business.



It's true, some shopkeepers or librarians may be unfriendly, or they may give you the impression that they disapprove of what you are doing. But if you meet an unpleasant salesperson, try another bookstore. If the librarian at the public library makes you uncomfortable, try the library at school, or vice versa.

Go with a friend. You can give each other moral support!

Although it's a bit complicated, if you are interested in ordering a book directly from the publishers and you have the money—or can chip in with a friend to buy a book together—here is how to go about it:

First you need to write a letter to the publishers asking them to send you an order form for the book you want. For instance, a letter like this would be fine:

(Date)

Dear Publishers,

Could you please send me information about how to purchase (write in the name of the book you want)? My address is (write in your address). Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)

When the publishers write back to you, they will tell you how much money you need to send them along with the order. Because it's risky to send money through the mail, you will probably want to take the correct amount of money to a bank or a post office and ask the clerk to give you a money order for that amount which you can then enclose with your order. There is a small fee for getting a money order, so take along a bit of extra money. Two dollars would be more than enough. Be sure that you also include a note with your order, again giving the name of the book you want, and your address.

If all of this seems like too much trouble, buying the book yourself at a bookstore, or using the library are probably the best ways for you to get these books.

Unless, of course, you ask your parents to help you get them. . .

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR PARENTS

If you're someone who thinks that talking with your parents is out of the question, these suggestions might be helpful.

1. Think about what you want to talk about.

Do you want to let your parents know that you are thinking about all of this, but not get into a really big discussion?

Do you want information about some specific topic?

Which one?

Are there others?

2. Given what you are interested in talking about, who do you think you'd be most comfortable talking to?

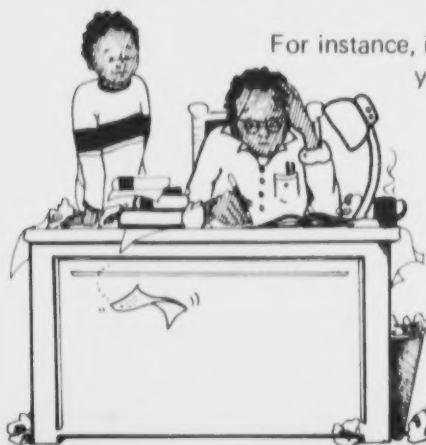
Either Mom or Dad

Mom

Dad

3. After you've decided what you want to talk about and who you want to talk to, think about picking a good TIME and PLACE for this talk.

For instance, if you want to talk to your dad, don't try to talk to him when he's in the middle of giving your little brother or sister a bath, or when he's busy.



If you're not sure it's a good time for him to talk, **ask**. You could say:

Dad, I want to talk to you about something. Is this a good time?

If you are feeling a little embarrassed, and privacy is important to you, say so. You might say:

Dad, I feel kind of embarrassed, but I want to talk to you—in private. I don't want you to tell anyone, even Mom, everything we say. Is this a good time?

If it's not a good time to talk, your dad can suggest a better time.

4. Eventually he'll say something like, "OK, son, what is it?" And then what do you say?

The answer to this question depends a lot on what it is that you really want to talk about. For instance, suppose you are interested in knowing more about erections. Here are some things you might want to know about or have help with:

You might want specific information about why and when erections happen. You might say:

I want to know about getting erections, about why they happen, and when they happen. Can you tell me about it, or get me some books to read?

You might want to ask your dad about his own experience. You might say:

Do you remember the first time you got an erection? What happened?

Were you embarrassed to get erections when you were my age? What did you do?

Are you still embarrassed to get an erection?

Think about what it is you want to know or talk about, and write down some specific questions. If you think about it a little bit ahead of time, it will be easier when you get around to the actual conversation.

5. Sometimes, props are helpful in starting a conversation.

Almost anything can be used as a prop. For instance, to get the conversation going, you can mention something that happened. You might say:

Today at school all the kids were talking about . . .

In health class today (if your school has health classes), we talked about . . .

You can show your dad a book that you've taken out of the library. You might say:

There's a book I'd like you to see.

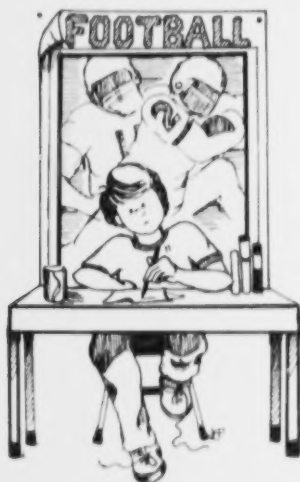
There's this book at school and I'd kind of like to bring it home and talk about it, but it's about personal stuff, and I can't think of where to keep it so that it'll be private. Got any ideas?

6. You might want to talk to your mom about some parts of growing up.

You might be interested in what she and her friends thought about erections when they were your age.

And your mom would probably be a good source of information if you have questions about what changes girls your age are going through.

7. Think about if actually **TALKING** to your parents is the best way to communicate with them.



Some kids and parents find that it's easier to **write** back and forth to each other than it is to talk face to face.

Maybe writing would be easier in your family, too.

8. Keep in mind that you are probably not the only one who is uncomfortable about talking about these things.

Your parents may be a little uncomfortable about talking about these things as well. Maybe it was hard for them to talk to their parents about growing up when they were young. Even though **you** are ready to have a talk with one or both of them, **they** may not feel ready to have such a talk with you. They may need a little time to think about what they'd like to say, or how they'd like to say it.



- 9. Finally, if after trying some of these suggestions you are convinced that you can't talk with your parents, but still have questions and need information:**

Try to think of someone else to talk to—like an older brother or sister, or an adult friend (maybe one of your parents' friends, your doctor, or a teacher) and **try again!**

AND NOW FOR SOME SPECIFIC INFORMATION . . .

In the beginning of this pamphlet we mentioned that there could be lots of embarrassment between boys and girls during puberty—in part because boys don't know very much about what happens to girls and girls don't know very much about what happens to boys. We think that if boys have more information about what girls go through—and girls have more information about what boys go through—in general, everyone will be a little more understanding and a little less likely to tease someone who is changing.

We'd like to help by sharing some information with you about a very important part of puberty for girls—menstruation, or getting a period. In our work with both girls and boys your age, we've learned that boys have lots of questions about menstruation—and girls have thoughts about what they think boys ought to know.

Just What Is Menstruation Anyway?

Most boys have some idea of what menstruation is. Here is a very simple description. Menstruation is a kind of bleeding that can last for a period of several days. It's not like bleeding from a cut or a wound (it doesn't gush out) and only a small amount of bleeding (about one tablespoon per day) is involved. The blood comes out from between the legs through a special opening from the inside of the body. Once bleeding stops, it usually doesn't start again until about three weeks later. In general, but not always, there are about 28 days between the first day of one period and the first day of the next period. During her period, a girl wears a pad or tampon to absorb the blood so that it doesn't leak out onto her clothes. (For more information, you might want to look at one of the books we mentioned before on page 6.)

When Does Menstruation Begin?

Many girls who haven't started to menstruate, but have started to think about it, wonder when they will start and if there's any way to predict exactly when their first period will be. While there isn't any way to know exactly, it is true that often, but not always, a girl will get her first period around the age at which her mother got her first period. Some girls get their periods as early as eight years old, some as old as sixteen or seventeen. The average age in this country when girls get their period is around twelve and a half years old.

Researchers don't know for sure what all of the biological changes are that have to occur before a girl is ready to menstruate for the first time, but some think that girls may need to have a certain amount of body fat, in relation to muscle, before menstruation will occur. Without the necessary amount of fat, which isn't very much overall, menstruation may not happen. It is also generally true that menstruation happens after other pubertal changes—such as a growth spurt or the beginning of breast development—have already occurred. So, if girls have experienced most of those other changes—but not menstruation—a first period should not be too far off.

The important thing to remember is that everyone's pattern of growth is unique, and that information based on averages is only a clue about what might happen to any one person.

What Do Boys Think About Menstruation?

When boys first hear about menstruation, some are embarrassed. Some are "grossed out." These feelings can stop boys from asking questions about it. We've talked to older college-aged boys about menstruation. Many said that when they first heard about menstruation, they felt very embarrassed but that gradually they began to wonder what girls felt like. Some said that they felt sorry for girls because they thought that girls might be scared by the blood. Some

were worried for girls because they thought that girls felt sick and were in pain during their periods. Some told us that they never really learned much about menstruation until much later, when they had a steady girl friend whom they trusted and who told them about what it was like.

What Do Girls Think About Menstruation?

Here's what we've learned from girls about what they think about menstruation. In general, most girls have mixed reactions. For instance, most girls think that menstruation is normal, and that it is a sign of growing up. At the same time, some girls mention that menstruation is embarrassing. Some are concerned about whether other people know they are having a period...or what to do if their period starts, for instance, on the way home on the bus or in the middle of math class...or what to do if the blood accidentally leaks onto their clothes.

Girls do not want to be teased about menstruating. If you notice that a girl has a bloodstain on her clothes, you can be helpful by not calling it to everyone's attention. Hopefully, you'll find a way to let your friend know privately so that she can go take care of it without being embarrassed in front of a lot of people. Girls also hope that their privacy will be respected. They may not want you to hang around their lockers or go snooping around in their backpacks or bookbags because they have pads or tampons in them that they need.

Finally, girls we've worked with wish boys knew more about menstruation even though they may not want to talk to boys about it. During the first few years of having a period, girls have enough to do just getting used to menstruating. Boys can help them adjust by not making a big deal out of it.

What Else Do I Need to Know?

You may be a lot more questions about menstruation than we can possibly answer in this pamphlet. Of course, some questions are easier to find answers to than others. For instance, if you would like to know more about what actually happens in the body during menstruation, you can look it up in one of the books we recommended earlier on page 6. It's harder to find the answer to questions like—What does menstruation feel like? How does menstruation affect girls? Can girls do everything that they usually do while they're having a period?

In some ways, these questions can't be answered. What's important to remember at the beginning is that girls and women have lots of different experiences with menstruation. What's true for one person may not be true for another. It takes time to get used to having a period and only by experiencing it does each girl learn what she is comfortable doing—or not doing—during it.

No one description of menstruation applies to everyone.

This is especially important information for boys because, in general, boys (and men) think that having a period is much more of an ordeal for girls and women than girls and women think it is. It's important not to assume that your friend or your sister is going to have a certain kind of period or behave in a certain way during menstruation.

We hope that the information in this pamphlet will begin to answer some of your questions about menstruation—or, at least, make you feel a little more comfortable with the idea of it so that you can ask more questions about it.

We hope you'll be able to talk to one or both of your parents about it. While your mom may have more specific information about what it's like to menstruate, don't forget that your father, because of living with her, has had lots of experience with it too—although a different kind of experience.

We wish you success in finding the answers to any questions you have about growing up. And we hope that some of the suggestions we've made and the information we've given are helpful to you.

POSTSCRIPT

I'm interested in your reactions to this pamphlet. Please tell me what you think of it, and whether or not it was helpful.

Write to:

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BODY TALK pamphlets may be ordered from the Publications Department, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02181

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